

Waterfowl Advisory Committee
Minutes, November 13, 2007
Rembert Dennis Building
Columbia, South Carolina

MEMBERS PRESENTS: Chair Sam Hiott, William “Tadpole” Baldwin, Jr., Parker Barnes, Jr., Carlyle Blakeney, Jr., Billy Ray Cato, Campbell Coxe, Lin Fore, Phil Wilkinson, and Stephen Thomas via conference telephone

MEMBERS ABSENT: Robin Inabinet, Craig LeSchack, Craig Sasser

DNR STAFF PRESENT: Breck Carmichael, Derrell Shipps, Tim Ivey, Sam Chappellear, Walt Rhodes, Dean Harrigal, Jamie Rader, Sam Stokes, Jr., Jamie Dozier, Susan Johnson and Major Greg Smith

There were no constituents present.

Chair Hiott opened the meeting and the minutes of the August 14, 2007 meeting were approved as submitted.

PEER REVIEW TEAM UPDATE:

Chair Hiott stated the Peer Review Team visited South Island and Cat Island on November 1, 2007. An extensive introduction and review of the Islands was given. Chair Hiott thanked the Team (Committee Member Phil Wilkinson, Lou Crouch of Chehaw Cumbee Plantation, Committee Member Craig Sasser, Mike Provost of The Nature Conservancy, Colin Smith of Ducks Unlimited, DNR Region IV Wildlife Coordinator Sam Chappellear and DNR Wildlife Biologist Jamie Dozier) for their participation in the review. Chair Hiott thanked Jamie for hosting the Team and thanked him for his efforts in the review process.

Committee Member Wilkinson stated the Team was unanimous in their praise of Jamie’s grasp of the Islands after having been the manager for only a few months. The Team concentrated primarily on infrastructure needs and will consider management issues in future visits. A compilation of Team Members notes of their review and management suggestions will be finalized and presented to the Waterfowl Advisory Committee for its approval prior to being submitted to the DNR Board.

Wilkinson noted there is a need for the construction and replacement of a number of water control trunks on the Islands, and the Peer Review Team report may recommend that trunk construction be contracted in order to get a large number replaced in a short time period. This would require the approval of DNR and the Yawkey Foundation Trustees. Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Deputy Director Breck Carmichael asked that the Team include in their final report an estimate of the cost in contracting the trunk work.

Chair Hiott stated once the Peer Review process on South and Cat Islands is completed, plans are for the Team to conduct a review of Bonneau Ferry Wildlife Management Area.

WATERFOWL HUNTING AND BAITING GUIDE:

Wildlife Biologist Dean Harrigal distributed copies of the Guide (copy attached to the original minutes). Harrigal stated the Guide is modeled after the US Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) guide and includes frequently asked questions/answers. The Guide also addresses potential problem areas in terms of what is/is not legal. Harrigal further stated prior to printing, the Guide was thoroughly reviewed by Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries staff, Law Enforcement Division staff, and the USFWS Atlanta Office. The Guide has been distributed to Conservation Officers statewide and is posted on the DNR website. Additionally, the Guide will be distributed to hunters at DNR duck hunt sites.

DNR LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR 2008:

Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Deputy Director Breck Carmichael distributed copies of DNR's 2007 Draft Legislative Proposal List (copy attached to the original minutes). Carmichael stated the DNR Board and Director Frampton have decided the Agency's major legislative emphasis again this year will be on the budget. DNR will ask for a total of \$14.8 million in recurring and non-recurring appropriated dollars.

Carmichael further stated that several bills would automatically become active again in the upcoming General Assembly due to 2008 being the second year of a session. The Game Zone Consolidation Conforming Bill (S.691) is a technical clean-up bill relating to reducing from 11 to 6 game zones, which became effective July 1, 2007.

Senate Bill 452 (recreational alligator harvest) passed the Senate last year and went to the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. Carmichael expects this bill will receive rapid attention and hopefully quick passage due to the interest and attention to this issue.

Senate Bill 423, a repeals bill, is also a technical clean-up bill.

House Bill 3510 amended the statute relating to the purchase of the state's migratory waterfowl stamp. The bill would have allowed the electronic sale of the migratory waterfowl stamp, and makes other minor changes to the workings of the Migratory Waterfowl Committee. This bill was amended in the House Committee to increase the cost of the duck stamp from \$5.50 to \$10.00. Carmichael stated that although DNR did not request the increase, the Agency supported the increase. Results from the waterfowl hunter survey conducted two years ago indicated support for a price increase as well, as long as funds derived from the increase would be used for waterfowl management. Governor Sanford vetoed the bill and the General Assembly sustained his veto. Staff plans to re-file the bill, without the fee increase, in an effort to get technical changes that are needed.

Committee Member Baldwin stated he has had difficulty in purchasing hunting licenses by telephone in that it took approximately one hour and forty minutes to purchase six

licenses. Deputy Director Carmichael responded that he would let Baldwin know whom to contact in DNR about the problem he encountered. Baldwin also mentioned that he had discussed this situation with Director Frampton.

Carmichael stated DNR proposes a change to the current turkey baiting statute that would be similar to dove baiting, but not as liberal. Carmichael further stated the proposed change will allow hunting of turkeys in areas where grains have been scattered solely as the result of “normal agricultural practices” as defined by Clemson University Extension Service; for example mowing of standing crops, disking, burning, livestock grazing and other common farming procedures.

Carmichael also referenced the Harvest Information Program (HIP) Permit legislation, which would allow individuals who possess lifetime senior or disability licenses to obtain the HIP permit one time instead of every year since they have no other yearly license requirements.

AVIAN INFLUENZA SURVEILLANCE:

Derrell Shipps, Chief, Statewide Projects, Research and Surveys reminded the Committee there is a national effort to look for the Avian Influenza (AI) virus in shorebirds, waterbirds and waterfowl. Shipps distributed copies of a summary of activity this past year (copy attached to the original minutes). Shipps stated DNR and USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services submitted approximately 1,000 samples to the National Lab for surveillance for the virus, and asked committee members to bear in mind the highly pathogenic strain of AI that has caused bird mortalities and some human deaths in Asia and Europe has not been found in North America. However, a significant number of samples that were submitted were found to have low-path AI, which is continually present in wild bird populations. For this year’s sampling, there has been a de-emphasis on shore and waterbirds and an increased emphasis on waterfowl. DNR will provide approximately 500 samples to include 400 diving ducks, 100 dabbling ducks and a few shorebirds. Waterfowl collections will occur at DNR hunt sites as well as some private areas. Shipps further stated in all waterfowl mortality events of unknown cause, DNR staff would collect samples from those birds, in cooperation with the federal program. Shipps indicated DNR is utilizing the federal money available for this program.

DROUGHT IMPACTS ON DNR WATERFOWL AREAS:

Deputy Director Carmichael stated he wanted to ensure Committee Members are aware DNR is experiencing drought conditions on some of its waterfowl management areas. Sandy Beach (Berkeley County) and Hickory Top Greentree Reservoir (Clarendon County) will not be open for waterfowl hunting this season due to a lack of available water for flooding the impoundments. In the case of Hickory Top, this is not all bad as greentree reservoirs need to be kept dry about 1 year in every 3 or 4 years anyway, to maintain vigor in the mast producing trees. A discussion followed.

At this point Committee Member Thomas, who was participating in the meeting by telephone, asked if he could put forward 2 motions, as he would soon have to disconnect. Chair Hiott granted Thomas’ request.

Thomas stated that waterfowl data that has been captured in the past few years does not reflect released mallards at checkpoints where the data is collected. Thomas made a motion asking DNR to train technicians and biologists collecting data at these check points to look for release bands and toe clips in an effort to collect released mallard data. Dean Harrigal stated DNR employees manning check stations know the difference in wild/released mallards and so note the information. He further stated pollution in the data Committee Member Thomas refers to comes from unmanned check stations where released and wild mallards are not separated in the harvest accounting. Thomas asked that DNR biologists ensure that the released mallard versus wild mallard information be segregated at all of DNR's manned check stations. The motion was seconded and received unanimous approval from the Committee.

Thomas further stated he had seen reference to surveys conducted around the Samworth Wildlife Management Area over a 21-years period in a 2005 DNR Waterfowl Project Report. The surveys consisted of 1,289 waterfowl hunters per year on lands and waters adjacent to Samworth. Thomas made a motion that the same survey be resurrected in the area with results compared to the previous surveys in an effort to determine if the more restrictive hunting in Carr and Little Carr creeks has made the hunting experience better or worse for waterfowl hunters. Derrell Shipes stated the surveys referenced were designed to count hunters, shots and boats, and he was not aware that any individual hunters were surveyed to gauge hunting quality. Shipes also stated the surveys was to assist with Law Enforcement efforts regarding trespassing and other illegal activities.

Deputy Director Carmichael stated that since Carr and Little Carr Creeks were made Category II waterfowl areas, all feedback he has received as a result of the change has been positive. A discussion followed and Committee Member Thomas withdrew his motion.

WATERFOWL HUNTING AND MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN REGION II: Region II Wildlife Coordinator Sam Stokes, Jr. provided a power point presentation. Stokes stated Region II consists of thirteen counties and includes one Category I waterfowl management area (Broad River in Fairfield County), and eight Category II waterfowl areas.

Stokes described the history and management regime of the Broad River WMA, stating it began as an SCE&G mitigation project for a dam upgrade at Parr Reservoir. The area has five impoundments totaling 130 acres. Approximately 75 acres of the property is planted in corn and the property includes once green tree reservoir. The property was initially hunted as a first-come, first-served hunt on Saturday mornings only. Safety became a concern so hunts are now conducted by drawing (12 hunters per hunt). The area is typically hunted every Saturday during the second segment of the waterfowl season. Wintering species include mallards (30 to 40%), green-winged teal, ring-necks and wood ducks.

Stokes stated there are 8 Category II areas in the Region, 3 in the Piedmont and 5 in the Coastal Plain. Stokes further stated there are good hunting opportunities available on

these areas that are hunted 1 to 2 days per week. Habitat types include reservoirs and headwaters, beaver swamps, oxbows and seasonally flooded freshwater wetlands. Future management possibilities include investigating some beaver swamps on Marsh and Woodbury WMA's to determine potential sites for installation of water control structures.

OLD BUSINESS:

Committee Member Wilkinson inquired about surveying participation of the public and hunter satisfaction regarding the statewide youth waterfowl hunting days.

Derrell Shipes stated that except for DNR areas, DNR is not staffed to collect the amount and quality of information needed to make a valid assessment. A discussion followed. Deputy Director Carmichael noted that Law Enforcement Officers will check hunters on the December youth day, as well as on the 2 February youth days, and the information collected will be recorded in their monthly activity reports. This could provide some evaluation of the relative popularity of the hunts. Chair Hiott stated following the upcoming youth day hunts; this topic will be further discussed.

Carmichael addressed the Committee's desire for a venue for communicating with the public via internet. Carmichael reported on the DNR web page there is a forum category and the WAC could be added to the forum allowing the public to make comments to the Committee. Carmichael stated the forum would need to include a statement that while committee members would review public comments, a response from committee members would not be generated. Chair Hiott requested that Carmichael proceed with setting the forum up through DNR's webmaster.

NEW BUSINESS:

Committee member Fore asked DNR's position on the use of motorized vehicles in lake areas with low water levels. Major Greg Smith stated there had been attempts to prohibit use of vehicles within the lakebed of the Santee Cooper lake system. Several trespass cases were made, but after review by DNR and Santee Cooper attorneys the cases were dismissed, as it was determined there was no authority to prohibit the activity. Wildlife Chief Ivey stated trespass of that type could be enforced on DNR wildlife management areas. The Santee National Wildlife Refuge also prohibits the activity by federal regulation.

Committee member Baldwin asked how many hunting opportunities will be available on DNR waterfowl areas during Thanksgiving season. Chief Ivey stated most of the Category II areas that have water would be open either the Wednesday prior to Thanksgiving or on the Saturday following Thanksgiving. Baldwin then asked why there is only one hunt on the former Santee Gun Club property (now Santee Coastal Reserve). Ivey stated hunt units are alternated so the sites can be properly staffed and in dealing with brackish impoundments, flooding too early would result in destruction of vegetation. Hunting pressure is also a consideration. Carmichael stated the question comes down to whether DNR should manage its waterfowl areas for quality or quantity. Thus far the agency has elected to manage in a manner to provide the highest quality waterfowl hunting experience.

Committee member Fore stated that there continues to be interest in increasing hunting opportunities on Santee Coastal Reserve. Carmichael stated once the full staff is in place on SCR (additional boat captains, etc.) additional hunting opportunities will be considered. Chair Hiott stated the Committee could further discuss this issue after hunting season ends.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS:

Committee member Coxe stated he hopes everyone has a safe and successful duck-hunting season.

Committee member Barnes stated committee members should be working on getting more individuals interested in hunting.

Chair Hiott thanked committee members for attending the meeting.

TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING:

February 12, 2008, 10:00 A.M. Location to be announced.